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ABSTRACT

This report analyzes the findings from an evaluation of the Alabama Commission on Higher Education, using data from interviews with leaders around Alabama and leaders from business, local and state government, news media, and education. Section 1 describes the approach taken to this required evaluation. Section 2 explains terminology used in the report. Section 3 describes seven principal findings, including: Alabama faces an extraordinary challenge to maintain its competitive position within the global economy and in the south and Alabama's leaders have not made a compelling case to the public about the critical link between higher/postsecondary education and their futures. Section 4 presents five recommendations, including: focus on a public agenda for the future of Alabama; link fiscal policy to the public agenda; and develop a new generation of quality assurance policies. Section 5 notes the critical role of the governor. Section 6 presents a summary and conclusions. Section 7 reviews common initiatives and accomplishments, highlighting access, excellence, accountability, and responsibility. Section 8 lists members of the Seventh Quadrennial Evaluation Committee. Section 9 lists participants in area discussion sessions. Section 10 presents the Commission statute. (SM)

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The Report of the Seventh Quadrennial Evaluation Committee

ED 446 550

A Committee to Evaluate the Effectiveness of the Alabama Commission on Higher Education

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The Report of the Seventh Quadrennial Evaluation Committee

A Committee to Evaluate the Effectiveness of the Alabama Commission on Higher Education

February 1999

The Seventh Quadrennial Evaluation Committee

From left to right: **Aims C. McGuinness, Jr., Chair**
William B. Keller, Karen A. Bowyer and John T. Wolfe, Jr.

We, the members of the committee to evaluate the Alabama Commission on Higher Education, studied Alabama and its needs as part of our study of ACHE. We conducted the study as required by Sec. 12, Act 79-461, which requires the evaluation of ACHE every four years, and we are pleased to send you our report. The report analyzes and boils down the findings of countless interviews with leaders from around Alabama, leaders from business, local and state government, news media and education.

As required by the law mandating the ACHE study every four years, we are sending copies of this report to to the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, members of the Legislature and to presidents and governing boards of the state's colleges and universities. In addition, it is being made available to the public.

The Seventh Quadrennial Evaluation Committee

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The Report of the Seventh Quadrennial Evaluation Committee

Introduction

The Seventh Quadrennial Evaluation of the Alabama Commission on Higher Education took place at a critical turning point for Alabama, for higher/ postsecondary education, and for statewide coordination. With the election of a new Governor, Alabama's political, business, and civic leaders have a fresh opportunity to shape an agenda to uplift the well-being of all the state's people through education and the extraordinary capacity of the state's colleges and universities. Higher/postsecondary education is facing unprecedented demands for accessible, responsive services. The global market, fueled by information technology, is forcing fundamental changes in the modes of delivery of programs. Statewide coordination is also in a period of fundamental transition. The regulatory policies of the past are no longer adequate or suitable for the rapidly changing conditions. As market forces drive institutional and student behavior, state governments must give more attention than ever before to the questions of the public interest or public good that the market is unlikely to serve. Critical elements of the population may go unserved. Important state assets, whose value to the state and its people go beyond the immediate demands of the market, may be damaged. Statewide coordination in the next century will play a central role in shaping a consensus about a public agenda and in using incentives and a new generation of regulations to ensure that the state's higher/postsecondary education resources are aligned with that agenda.

Approach to the charge

The statute that established the Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE) provides for its evaluation by an external committee of consultants during the last year of each gubernatorial term. The statutory charge to the review committee is "... to evaluate the effectiveness of the Commission and to recommend changes as necessary." (*Commission Statute, Section 16-5-12).* The Seventh Quadrennial Evaluation Committee was asked particularly to identify areas of concern and indicate their importance to the state.

Alabama is the only state in the nation with a statutory requirement that the state coordinating board undertake a periodic evaluation using an external panel. The major benefit of this approach is that it provides a periodic, constructive means for the Commission to improve the quality of its performance. The evaluation also provides an opportunity for the Commission and the State of Alabama to reassess its statewide coordinating policies and processes in light of changes in the state and higher/postsecondary education.

The Committee's evaluation was of the Commission, not of Alabama's higher education system. Yet it would be impossible to assess ACHE's effectiveness without placing the Commission in a broader context. Ultimately, one should evaluate the Commission in terms of its impact on the State of Alabama and on the capacity of the state's higher/postsecondary education system to meet the state's needs for educational opportunity and services. Therefore, the Committee framed all its conversations over the past six months with these questions:

1. What are the major challenges facing the State of Alabama now and over the next five years? We solicited views on the challenges facing the people, economy, quality of life, government, and areas

other than higher/postsecondary education.

2. What are the major challenges facing higher/postsecondary education in Alabama? We particularly solicited views on the intersection of the broader issues raised in #1 with those specifically related to higher education.

3. What has the Alabama Commission on Higher Education done especially well over the past five years?

4. What could the Commission have done better over the past five years?

5. Are there other issues that the Committee should address or specific recommendations that we should consider regarding the effectiveness of the Commission?

A point about terminology

Throughout this report we use "higher/postsecondary education" to underscore that ACHE must have both the authority and credibility to provide policy leadership for all tertiary education in Alabama — including, explicitly, the community and technical colleges under the governing authority of the State Board of Education. One way for the Commission to achieve that credibility is for it to lead in shaping a public agenda for the future Alabama's workforce in which all sectors — community colleges, technical colleges, and universities — have a stake. By "public agenda" we mean an agenda framed in terms of social and economic health and well-being of the people and communities of Alabama. Higher/postsecondary education is the single most powerful means to uplift the life-chances and quality of life of the state's citizens. As we elaborate below, only the Alabama Commission on Higher Education has the potential to rise over sector interests and to serve as a driving, behind-the-scenes force in the shaping of a common agenda around which *all* higher/postsecondary education can rally.

Principal findings

1. Alabama faces an extraordinary challenge to maintain, if not strengthen, its competitive position not only in the South but also within the global economy. To compete, Alabama must raise the education attainment of its population and the quality of its workforce. The challenge is to reach *all* those who will need education and training throughout their lifetimes to earn a decent living, contribute to their families and communities, and remain competitive in the changing economy.

2. Alabama's leaders have not made a compelling case to the public about the critical link between higher/postsecondary education and their future — either as individuals or for the state as a whole. Low aspiration for further education among large segments of the population and lack of understanding of the knowledge and skills required for employment and survival in the developing economy are serious barriers to change.

3. Alabama must overcome fundamental constitutional and structural barriers in government, statewide leadership, tax policy, and serious continuing problems related to racial conflict. These barriers severely hinder the state's capacity to improve and sustain the competitiveness of its population, economy, and institutions.

4. Alabama has exceptional strengths in its people, its dynamic metropolitan areas, its diversified economy, its natural resources and environment, its quality of life, and in the quality of many of its higher/postsecondary education institutions — both public and private. In spite of these strengths,

Alabama lacks a coherent strategy to marshal these resources to address critical statewide problems.

5. The Alabama Commission on Higher Education has performed well over the past four years when judged mainly on its statutory charge as enacted in 1969 and modified over the years (most recently in 1996).

   - The Commission has done well in comparison to many coordinating boards in other states in identifying problems, and in working with the governor, state legislature, and higher education community to shape and implement practical policy solutions. Either directly or indirectly, the Commission has been a force in getting state action on new policy approaches. Examples include studies and policies on articulation and transfer, time-to-degree, program viability, strengthened student and faculty information systems, incentive and performance funding, facilities master planning, statewide library networks, and the administration of student aid programs.

   - By the nature of coordination, the Commission will never receive credit for most of what it does well and will frequently be blamed for problems over which it has no control. In many respects, "Effectiveness is inversely related to visibility." The Commission's effectiveness depends fundamentally on its ability to work with – – and the support it receives from – – the Governor, State Legislature, and the state's higher/postsecondary education leaders.

   - The Commission must perform its coordinating responsibilities in one of the most challenging political environments of any state in the nation. Every Quadrennial Evaluation Committee has underscored this point. The situation has changed remarkably little since 1969.

   - The Commission has a capable, dedicated, hard-working staff. Yet the staff effectiveness is severely limited by the reality that there are too few people spread over too many tasks and functions. ACHE has also found it difficult to break away from the obligations of the past (some of which are rooted in statute), in order to shape new approaches necessary for the changing policy environment. Attempting to bridge the gap between the old and the new has strained limited staff resources even further.

   - The Commission is stronger in working on the details of solutions than in shaping a compelling case for the public about what the problems are and why they need to be solved. Debates are easily sidetracked into conflicts about means (how something should be done and by whom) before there is broad agreement on ends (what public purpose, what priority).

   - The last four Quadrennial Evaluations (1983, 1987, 1991, and 1995) have underscored the Commission's responsibility to develop and gain a consensus around a public agenda or strategic plan. All evaluations have recommended a stronger link between the public agenda and fiscal policy. Despite the Commission's concerted efforts, the most recent plan is virtually invisible to external constituents and is not linked to fiscal policy.

   - The question facing the Commission is not whether it is "doing things right," but whether it is "doing the right things."

6. The Evaluation Committee's basic conclusion:

   The Alabama Commission on Higher Education must make a decisive transition from its

past role of containing, controlling, and regulating, to a new role of providing statewide policy leadership and serving as a catalyst for system and institutional change. The focus should be on the future of Alabama – – its people, economy and quality of life – – and the fundamental connection of that future with the strength and responsiveness of the state's higher/postsecondary education assets. The Commission cannot – – and should not – – attempt to be the visible leader of the statewide agenda, but it can be the key catalyst and source of compelling evidence that undergirds the visible leadership by the Governor and others.

7. The Commission cannot make this transition alone. It can only make this change with the leadership of the Governor, backed by legislative leaders, the state's business and civic leaders, and the higher/postsecondary education community.

Recommendations

1. **Change the core assumptions underlying the Alabama Commission on Higher Education's mission and functions**

The Committee recommends that the Commission pursue a fundamental change in the core assumptions regarding its mission and functions as a coordinating board. Key dimensions of the recommended change are as follows:

A shift from:	To:
Rational planning for static institutional models	Strategic planning for dynamic market models
Focus on providers, primarily public institutions	Focus on clients, students/learners, employers and governments
Service areas defined by geographic boundaries and monopolistic markets	Service areas defined by the needs of clients served by multiple providers
Tendency toward centralized control and regulation through tightly defined institutional missions, financial accountability, and retrospective reporting	More decentralized management using policy tools to stimulate desired response (e.g., incentives, performance funding, consumer information)
Policies and regulation to limit competition and unnecessary duplication	Policies to "enter the market on behalf of the public" and to channel competitive forces toward public purposes
Quality defined primarily in terms of resources (inputs such as faculty credentials or library resources) as established within higher education	Quality defined in terms of outcomes and performance as defined by multiple clients (students/learners, employers, government)

Policies and services developed and carried out primarily through public agencies and public institutions	Increased use of non-governmental organizations and mixed public/private providers to meet public/client needs (e.g., developing curricula and learning modules, providing student services, assessing competencies, providing quality assurance)

Two of the most challenging aspects of this change for the Commission will be:

- the shift from a focus on institutions to a focus on the future of Alabama – – its people, economy and quality of life; and
- the shift from policies and regulation to limit competition and unnecessary duplication, to policies to "enter the market on behalf of the public" and to channel competitive forces toward public purposes.

This kind of change cannot take place immediately but only through consistent policy direction from the Commission, and a policy-by-policy, function-by-function revision of all the Commission's activities (e.g., strategic planning, program approval and review, fiscal policy, information systems, advisory structures).

2. Focus on a public agenda for the future of Alabama

The Committee recommends that the Commission on Higher Education place central priority on developing – – and gaining consensus on – – a public agenda that (1) articulates the social, economic and educational challenges facing Alabama, and (2) provides strategies that will engage the state's higher/postsecondary education resources in addressing these challenges. In other words, we are recommending that the Commission play a central *advocacy* role – – not for institutions in the traditional sense, but for the critical role that higher/postsecondary education can play in uplifting the life-chances of all the state's population as well as the state's economy and quality of life. Workforce development increasing the competitiveness of Alabama's workforce – – should be an integral part – – but not the only part – – of this agenda.

The Alabama Commission on Higher Education has neither the authority nor political influence to be the visible leader to shape and gain consensus on a public agenda. The Commission's role should be to use information and analysis to define the issues and shape policy alternatives. The Commission's role should be to support those who *do* have the responsibility and capacity for statewide the leadership: the Governor and the state's business and civic leaders.

A core Commission responsibility should be to define the significant disparities in the quality, responsiveness, and accessibility of higher/postsecondary services (1) between Alabama and competitor states, and (2) between and among geographic areas, populations, and other key client groups within Alabama. Because of historical and political realities, there remain significant mismatches between the state's higher/postsecondary resources and the needs of the state's population, employers, and communities. The Commission should document these gaps. The Commission should then advocate policy changes to provide incentives for institutions to bridge these gaps and reach out to under-served populations.

3. Link fiscal policy to the public agenda

The Committee recommends that the Commission on Higher Education lead in an effort to shape a new funding policy for Alabama. Elements of this policy could include:

- Base funding for the state's public institutions taking into consideration differences in mission and peer competitors.
- Strategic investment funds – – representing no more than 5% of the base funding – – designed to provide incentives for institutions to respond to priorities as defined in the public agenda. Each investment fund would be designed to fit different objectives. Investment funds would focus on priorities such as:
  - Incentives for individual institutions (singularly or in collaboration with others) to undertake internal renewal (e.g., in response to Program Viability findings, to increase the institution's competitiveness in program development and delivery)
  - Incentives for institutions to reach high priority regions or populations that are not effectively served by market forces (e.g., high priority, low volume, place-bound populations).
  - Incentives for collaboration between and among institutions (joint/shared programming, faculty development, shared administrative and support services).
  - Matching funds to increase the research competitiveness of the state's major research universities – – especially in areas directly related to the state's economic competitiveness.
- State policies for long-term capital development and renewal.

4. Lead a statewide campaign to raise the education attainment of Alabama's youth and adult populations by ensuring greater accessibility of higher/postsecondary education services in all of the state's regions.

Possible strategies include the following:

- Target counties and populations with the lowest adult education attainment, lowest participation rates in higher/postsecondary education, and most severe economic conditions.
- Emphasize accessibility in terms not only of cost but also of responsiveness to learner needs, geographic access, time, and pedagogy.
- Emphasize use of existing human and physical resources (faculty, facilities, technology) rather than state investment in new fixed assets whenever feasible.
- Provide incentives for institutions (providers) to deliver to off-campus learning sites – – especially in areas with low education attainment, low higher/postsecondary participation, high poverty rates, and other critical indicators.
- Providing funding to multi-institutional faculty teams to develop new learning modules and delivery models – – especially to reach low volume, high need areas.
- Provide state support for learning sites (especially in priority areas) to support essential student

services and to obtain needed programs and services from providers.

- Encourage collaboration with secondary schools to enrich the academic offerings available to secondary students and improve the preparation of those students intending to pursue higher/postsecondary education.

- Provide incentives for institutions (providers) to demonstrate effective models for developmental education and to ensure that developmental education is accessible to target student populations on and off-campus.

- Eliminate barriers in current Commission finance and academic policies to institutional initiatives to serve priority off-campus sites and populations.

5. Develop a new generation of quality assurance policies

- Streamline new academic program approval based on consistency with institutional mission and performance expectations.

- Institute a requirement for a periodic external review of institutional quality assurance processes.

- Strengthen public reporting of information for student/consumer choice.

- Strengthen links with the Southern Regional Electronic Campus and other third-party mechanisms to ensure the quality of distance learning and other non-traditional educational providers.

Critical role of the Governor

All those with whom the Evaluation Committee met underscored the critical role of the Governor in leading the kind of public agenda we are recommending. Without the Governor's backing, it is unlikely that the Commission on Higher Education will be able to assume a stronger policy leadership role for all of higher/postsecondary education and to change the core assumptions under which it operates.

Summary and conclusion

The Alabama Commission on Higher Education faces a more difficult challenge in carrying out its responsibilities than the boards in most of the twenty-three states with similar structures across the nation. The assessment of the Seventh Quadrennial Evaluation Committee is that the Commission has done a remarkable job carrying out its basic statutory coordinating responsibilities in light of the political and economic conditions in which it has operated.

The Committee believes that this is a critical turning point for the Commission to move to a new, promising, and constructive leadership role. Statewide coordination — and especially statewide *policy leadership* — will be essential for Alabama to sustain its strengths and retain and build a competitive higher/postsecondary education system for the future. The Commission cannot play this leadership role if it attempts to do so with policy tools appropriate for an earlier age of coordination. Regulation will continue to be important, but a shift toward more strategic direction, a stronger link between this direction and funding policy, and greater use of information and incentives will be important. This statewide leadership cannot come from the individual governing boards whose concerns are by definition focused on specific sectors and institutions. This is the unique role of the Commission — a role that the governing boards

should recognize and support.

The Commission cannot lead alone. Nor can it expect to lead by formal authority. It must lead by the goals it articulates, the quality of its analysis, its reputation for objectivity and fairness, and its capacity to enable and support others who *can* take a visible leadership role. The Commission must shape an agenda that makes the compelling case for the link between the future of Alabama and its higher/ postsecondary education system.

A SUMMARY OF SOME COMMISSION INITIATIVES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In addition to its statutory responsibilities, the Commission on Higher Education has been active in other projects in the last decade. The list below highlights some of these initiatives and accomplishments.

ACCESS

- Enhanced the participation of black citizens in higher education, particularly through scholarships, such as the Minority Doctoral Scholarship Program. This program, initiated in cooperation with the Southern Regional Education Board, was designed to increase minority representation among faculty and staff at Alabama public colleges and universities. Alabama is now second highest in the Southeast in the number of participants in the program. A contract arrangement with Meharry Medical College supports the training of minority medical and dental students.

- Worked with the Southern Regional Education Board and participated in the Academic Common Market, allowing state students to share specialized programs not offered in Alabama; offering a tuition break for students wishing to study osteopathic medicine in other states; sharing Alabama veterinary medical education with five southern states and optometry studies with seven other states.

- Managed tuition equalization scholarships for students attending private institutions of higher education through the Alabama Student Grant Program.

- Managed the Alabama Guaranteed Student Loan Program until its merger with a similar program in Kentucky .

- Administered the Technology Scholarship Program for Alabama Teachers (TSPAT), the first program of its type in the country. Created by the Alabama Legislature, it enables public school teachers to take advanced technology training on scholarship.

- Administered the Alabama Student Assistance Program, a state-supported, federally matched grant program to help financially needy students. It is the state's only need-based student aid program for Alabama residents attending postsecondary educational institutions in Alabama.

- Administered scholarship programs benefiting Alabama students, including the Alabama National Guard Educational Assistance Program, the Appalachian Youth Scholarship Program, the State of Alabama Chiropractic Scholarship Program, the Police Officer's/ Firefighter's Survivor's Educational Assistance Program, and the Emergency Secondary Education Scholarship Program.

- At the request of the Department of Postsecondary Education, administered the All-Alabama

Academic Recognition Program scholarship awards to public two-year colleges.

- Published a brochure to inform high school students of opportunities for financial assistance.
- Continues to advocate an electronic system providing uniformity and instant access to transcripts from high school to the university level.

EXCELLENCE

- Continues to advocate the "Rising Junior" Exam, which will provide students with an evaluation of their strengths and weaknesses in core general education areas before their junior year and which will give institutions an assessment of their instructional programs in these areas.
- Continued to provide support for the Network of Alabama Academic Libraries (NAAL). A model of cooperation among academic institutions, NAAL and its statewide programs improve library services and materials available to Alabama's students, faculty, and other researchers.
- Promoted plans for the Alabama Virtual Library, an electronic network that will provide online information to all students and citizens with access through K-12 schools, colleges and public libraries.
- Adopted the findings of the Allied Health Study, matching the needs of the marketplace with the program offerings of two- and four-year institutions.
- Promoted the use and potential of Distance Learning and the participation of Alabama institutions in the Southern Regional Electronic Campus, which will give students access to programs and courses from a central point of reference.
- Participates in administering EPSCoR, the Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research, a federal-state partnership to enhance science and engineering research, linking institutions, industrial partners, the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA) and the Commission on Higher Education.
- Administered the federal Dwight D. Eisenhower Professional Development Program, a successful project designed to improve the teaching of core subjects, especially mathematics and science, through grants to support innovative programs for teachers.
- Administered the Eminent Scholars Program for senior institutions.
- Endorsed a "Distinguished Professorship" program to match private and state funds to attract outstanding educators.

ACCOUNTABILITY

- Worked with the Articulation and General Studies Committee established by the Alabama Legislature to implement "Articulation" legislation. This legislation was designed to guarantee the transferability of certain academic credits earned at one public institution to other public institutions in the state.
- Appointed an advisory committee on health profession work force needs of the future and studied the supply and demand of associate-degree allied health practitioners in selected fields.

- Drafted and supported legislation for a student unit record data system to track student participation in Alabama higher education.

- Conducted a "time to degree" study and recommended strategies to remove barriers preventing students from graduating in four years.

- Annually reviews the quality of offerings of out-of-state institutions for approval to offer programs to Alabama students at in-state locations.

RESPONSIBILITY

- Developed and implemented legislation that became law for the identification of programs for review through Program Viability criteria, requiring a minimum number of graduates per degree program. As a result of the program viability review, institutions already are streamlining academic offerings by phasing out unproductive programs, as well as merging and consolidating programs. In addition, institutions are exploring collaborative approaches for the delivery of academic programs.

- Drafted and implemented regulations requiring a facilities master plan which provides long-range forecasts of construction and acquisition needs.

- Developed and implemented legislation that raised out-of-state tuition to reflect cost differentials used in other states.

- Developed legislation that became law for the creation of a faculty unit record data system to collect information on workloads, academic credentials, salaries, and demographic data.

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LIST OF PARTICIPANTS IN AREA DISCUSSION SESSIONS

The Evaluation Committee conducted round-table discussion sessions in four cities – – Birmingham, Huntsville, Mobile, and Montgomery – – during the period August through October 1998. Each person listed below attended one of these discussion sessions.

Dr. Jimmy Baker
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Mr. Al Yeager
Director of Institutional Research and Planning, The University of South Alabama

The Evaluation Committee also met with the following Commission staff members in an orientation and in several follow-up sessions.

Dr. William O. Blow
Deputy Executive Director, Planning and Coordination

Ms. Susan Cagle
Assistant Director for Financial Affairs

Ms. Brenda Carter
Director of Programs

Dr. Kitty Collier
Director of Planning

Dr. Elizabeth French
Director of Non-Resident Institutions and Interagency Programs

Dr. Henry J. Hector
Executive Director

Dr. Sue O. Medina
Director, Network of Alabama Academic Libraries (NAAL)

Dr. Paul Mohr
Director of Special Programs

Mr. Ed Rutledge
Chief Financial Officer

Mrs. Diane Sherman

Director of Data Systems

Dr. William Wall

Director, Grants and Scholarships

Project Staff

Ms. Marilyn Fletcher

Project Secretary

Ms. Ellen E. Haulman

Assistant Director for Academic Affairs, Project Coordinator

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